



# CATAWBA COUNTY

Public Health Department

3070 11th Ave. Dr. S.E. - Hickory, NC 28602 - (828) 695-5801 - Fax (828) 695-4410

Douglas W. Urland, MPA, Health Director  
Ronette Starnes, RN, MSN, Nursing Supervisor  
Linda Greene, RN, Communicable Disease Nurse 695-5823  
Catawba County Public Health Phone: 695-5800  
Date: June 30, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **PUBLIC HEALTH OFFERS TIPS FOR AVOIDING RABIES**

With summer here and more people outdoors enjoying the warm weather, Catawba County Animal Control and Public Health officials are reminding citizens that this is also the season to be on alert for animals with rabies.

Catawba County has now recorded five cases of confirmed cases of rabies in wild animals that came into contact with pets in 2006, including three cases between July 12 and July 18.

The number of rabies-related human deaths in the United States has declined from more than 100 annually at the turn of the century to one or two per year in the 1990s. Modern treatments have proven nearly 100% successful. In the United States, human deaths associated with rabies occur in people who fail to seek medical assistance, usually because they were unaware of their exposure.

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system. Early symptoms of rabies in humans are non-specific, consisting of fever, headache, and general fatigue. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear which may include insomnia, confusion, and partial paralysis. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

"If a wild or unfamiliar animal bites you, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek medical attention immediately," said Doug Urland, Catawba County Public Health Director. "A health care provider will care for the wound and assess the risk for rabies exposure. Steps taken by the health care practitioner will depend on the circumstances of the bite. State and local health officials or veterinarians are readily available for consultation. If you or your pet is bitten, please contact Catawba County Animal Control at 464-7686."

Public Health Officials and Animal Control urge the public to be responsible pet owners. These tips will help prevent rabies in pets:

- Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats and ferrets. This requirement is important, not only to keep your pets from getting rabies but also to protect you if your animal is bitten by a rabid animal.
- Keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately.

- Call your local animal control agency to remove any stray, domesticated animals from your neighborhood. They may be unvaccinated and infected by the disease.
- Spay or neuter your pets to help reduce the number of unwanted pets that may not be properly cared for or regularly vaccinated.

Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals:

- Enjoy wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes) from a distance. **Do not** handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.
- **Never** adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. **Do not** try to nurse sick animals to health.
- Teach children **never** to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "Love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to learn.
- Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.
- When traveling abroad, avoid direct contact with wild animals and be especially careful around dogs in developing countries.

For more information on rabies please contact the Catawba County Public Health Department at 695-5800 or visit <http://www.cdc.gov> or <http://www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/rabies.html>.

###